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ABSTRACT

This paper advocates flexibility in the use of textbooks and materials for teaching languages for specific purposes. Language and communication instructors are encouraged to adopt a positive approach in drawing the relevant aspects out of textbooks and printed materials and linking them to the interactive features in the business and professional world. It is suggested that, in this way, an effective link from the base to the action can be built and communicative competence in learners can be prompted. Individual sections address the following topics: real world communication--interactive performance; the nature of real-world interactions; real-world communication tasks; an approach to textbooks and published materials; materials evaluation; use of textbook materials; adapting textbook materials; illustrations of materials adaptation; and the role of language instructors. (JL)

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FROM BASE TO ACTION : BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION TEXTBOOKS AND THE PROFESSIONAL WORLD

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INTRODUCTION

In most of the business and professional courses run by colleges and institutes of higher learning worldwide, the language and communication program is a dominant pre-course feature or an essential component within the course curriculum. The major premise for teaching language and communication to professional course students is in preparing and training them for communicative competence in the real world.

Real world communication, especially in oral situations, is interactive in nature. Communicative competence in these situations is therefore defined in terms of linguistic competence as well as pragmatic and strategic competence (Faerch, 1984). These three components must be present in order to ensure the success of the social or professional transactions that are taking place.

REAL WORLD COMMUNICATION-INTERACTIVE PERFORMANCE

Due to the importance of interactive performance in the professional world, the practical relevance of any language and communication course is essentially measured in terms of the authenticity of the tasks and interactions within the course. In designing effective ESP course materials and lesson structures, these qualities must be reflected. Even though the interactions are occurring within the classroom, a close parallel with the business or professional world has to be sought.

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To design authentic tasks and interactive situations within ESP courses, a valid starting point is to examine the nature and characteristics of interactions and tasks in the professional world so as to identify the salient features and the types of language use.

NATURE OF INTERACTIONS

Authenticity is one of natural characteristics of real-world interactions. It is the result of the context as well as the nature of the communication occurring within these interactions. In the professional or business world, the context of communication is meaningful within an authentic business or corporate setting. In coping with on-the-job communication needs, one will find that the context of the interaction is subjected to changes and modifications anytime. Hence, real-time interaction is required, such as the giving of spontaneous responses in job co-ordination, meetings and interviews. Status relationships inevitably exist amongst the participants because of their respective corporate ranks. Communicative competence is therefore dependant upon the professional, social and cultural needs of the situation.

NATURE OF TASKS

Along with the interactions, real-world tasks are distinctly content specific according to the nature of the transactions. These tasks are purposeful - as information transfer, job assignments, action co-ordination, reports, presentations and negotiations etc.. There is usually continuity of action involved in each task. The input and output of each series of tasks are inextricably related, in oral or written form. A job discussion or telephone conversation is usually followed-up by further actions or exchange of correspondence and a proposal usually ends up on the meeting or negotiation table.

Due to such multiplicity of tasks, professional and business communication is essentially multi-skill in nature. In addition, tasks are often open-ended in nature as the outcome of each transaction can never be predefined. There is the constant need to clarify and negotiate meaning because of the presence of information gaps. They require the application of problem-solving skills, linguistic actions and decision-making processes.

In handling the tasks, the level of language use varies according to the task nature and has to be appropriate within the given situation. Interactive communicative competence, in the linguistic, pragmatic and strategic sense , has to be achieved in order to execute the tasks successfully.

APPROACH TO TEXTBOOKS AND PUBLISHED MATERIALS

The implications of real-world interactions and tasks on the targets set for ESP programs cannot be neglected. Having looked at the nature of these interactions and tasks, the issue of teaching materials has to be addressed. To run effective ESP programs that closely parallel language use in the professional and business world, the features outlined in the sections above should be inherent in ESP materials and tasks design.

The question of how this can be achieved is indeed the concern of all language teachers. It is therefore essential for language practitioners to examine closely and evaluate the materials they are designing or using in ESP programs. The recent years of ESP research interests in the use of contextually-based materials, the application of the case methods and project work as well as the portfolio approach are indeed a reflection of the ESP teachers' needs and objectives set in the right direction.

The first question an ESP teacher normally raise in approaching textbooks and materials is the extent to which the textbooks or materials can fulfill the needs and targets of specific learner groups. It is often difficult to find a single textbook that closely matches all the training needs of a specific learner group. This is due to the fact that textbook writers seldom have the benefit of a needs analysis as can be carried out by the in-service language teacher.

As a result, textbooks are often varied in nature as they are usually written for a wide range of disciplines. For example, one can find business, accountancy, computer science, engineering or building science students sharing the same business or technical communication textbooks despite the fact that they tend to know little of each other's disciplines. Most textbooks are comprehensive in explanations and illustrations but varied as to the amount, the length and the types of exercises set up for

classroom practices. Materials and samples used to illustrate language use may or may not be authentic and the context may or may not be professionally based.

EVALUATIONS ON CONTEXTUAL, TASKS AND LINGUISTIC RELEVANCE

If ESP teachers fail to examine the materials critically and simply adhere to a single source of materials throughout the course, possible limitations can be readily seen. Learner motivation and the outcome of learning can indeed be affected.

It is worth to note that language and communication textbooks usually provide clear guidelines on the course curriculum and the topics. Most of the limitations, in fact, fall within the exercises and tasks. They can be contextually too general or culturally inappropriate for learners from different backgrounds. The coverage and the length of the exercises may not fit the course structure with regard to the duration, equipment and resources available. Some are inadequate in oral practices. Many exercises tend to be single rather than multi-skill in orientation. As a result, an exercise may be treated as an end in itself rather than the means in achieving some communicative purpose that must be validated by the outcome in an authentic or a pseudo-authentic situation. Careful evaluation is therefore advocated.

The context, tasks and language use are thus the main criteria for materials evaluation. The key consideration is the particular needs of individual groups of students in terms of the professional context and the types and levels of language use. These must in turn be embedded within situational tasks set up for the learners to participate. This is particularly crucial to the success of advanced ESL programs where the trend is to move the emphasis beyond linguistic competence to communicative competence in specific professional fields.

USE OF TEXTBOOK MATERIALS

The constraints of time and manpower experienced in most ESL/ESP teaching situations mean that textbooks and printed materials still provide the most convenient source of teaching materials. Despite the limitations, it is pragmatically viable that textbooks and published materials be viewed positively and adopted as essential course references.

The major argument in support of this view lies in the fact that textbooks provide the indispensable source of linguistic models in the target language. Besides providing an understanding of communication types, correct formats and structures are taught. Clear examples of such are the various texts written to teach business correspondence or the use of graphics. Textbooks often provide a list of language points for both the teachers and the students, such as a glossary of linguistic items or lexical and stylistic features of different genres of communication. Pertinent examples of organisation structures and language use are also highlighted in samples of writing, such as the different types of business and technical reports. These are particularly useful in ESL situations where linguistic models play an important role in language acquisition.

From the point of view of language teachers, textbooks if used discriminately and analytically, can become valuable aids in their materials and tasks design for individual lessons or course modules. Gathering from a variety of textbook sources, a resource bank for ideas can be formed, especially on the lesson content, the teaching approach and as basis for applying the case method and project work. Textbook exercises may also be a resource bank for lesson and task structures though the situations and content may have to be modified to suit specific learner groups. Even if the particular assignment or exercise may be inadquate in itself, it may be a useful starting point and basis for extended tasks and extended language activites inside or outside the classroom.

ADAPTING TEXTBOOK MATERIALS - USEFUL CRITERIA

In order to bridge the gap between language and communication textbooks and the professional world where the learners will function, meaningful adaptation is the key to designing effective teaching materials. To achieve this, several principles can be applied. They are :

(1)Contextual adjustments,
(2)Redesigning tasks,
(3)Tapping and merging resources and
(4)Promotion of interactive performance.

CONTEXTUAL ADJUSTMENTS

A textbook exercise can be examined and contextual adjustments can be made according to the teacher's understanding of the social, cultural and professional needs of the learners.

Additional factors such as the age and experience, the language standards, the interests and the motivational needs of the learners have to be taken into account. In view of the increasing demand on a person to play more than one role within an organisation, a multi-disciplinary approach is advocated in making contextual adjustments. A combination of business and technical content seems to be readily recognised by learners as being practically relevant.

REDESIGNING TASKS

In redesigning some of the tasks set in textbooks, the teacher should have a multi-dimensional approach in mind and not be limited by the single task the exercise may originally demand. Tasks redesigned should provide simultaneous training in as many of the four basic language skills as possible. This can be achieved with continuity of tasks set or with modifications on the structure, the mode and the extent of the tasks themselves. It is also a matter of effective classroom management by the teachers. A switch from an individual to group work or a combination of both oral and written mode in the assignment can bring about such multi-dimensional characteristics.

TAPPING AND MERGING RESOURCES

In the process of textbook adaptations, the language teacher may find that contextual adjustments and tasks redesigned from a single source may still be a distance away from the authentic tasks and interactions aimed for. There is a need to go beyond one text and utilize other resources. Resources from the professional fields of the learners have to be tapped. Institutional support and resources from journals, case reports and project setups in related fields should also be merged in order to produce a comprehensive set of materials for the teaching module. In terms of learners' motivation and outcome, such investments in time and manpower can prove to be extremely worthwhile.

PROMOTION OF INTERACTIVE PERFORMANCE

The final consideration on teaching materials is the extent to which authentic interaction can be generated. Interactive performance has to be aimed at if communicative competence is to be promoted. The materials and tasks must be meaningful enough to stimulate interactive response from the learners. Aspects of possible interaction with the materials, with other participants as well as with the environment can be built. Examples of such

are case studies and portfolio projects which draw active participation and authentic interaction with regard to scenerios and aspects of the learners' professional world.

PROCESS OF MATERIALS ADAPTATION ILLUSTRATED

As illustrations of the process of materials adaptation based on the principles outlined above, two sets of materials adapted and designed for an advanced ESP course for engineering students are presented in the appendix of this paper. A brief description of the language targets, the context and the nature of the tasks in each case will enhance understanding of the process and the principles behind their design.

CASE I

The objective set for the exercise in Case I (Appendix A) is to provide training in the language and skills of data presentation. Ideas are borrowed from technical communication texts. However, a review of existing textbook exercises on the subject shows that most exercises require the learners simply to construct graphics out of some given data. The applications of such in professsional situations and the interactions that are usually involved are not precisely taken into account. To meet such practical needs, the adaptations are mainly based on contextual modifications, adjustments in the mode of the exercise and extension of the tasks.

As an appeal to technical students, the context of the situation is specifically set in the automobile industry and involves a team of engineers in data presentation on market trends and production directions for the Strategic Planning Committee. Oral and written modes are used as the learners are engaged in group work through the construction of the graphics, discussions on the graphic descriptions, interpretation of the data and the preparation of the presentation script. The tasks are further extended to a meaningful and pseudo-authentic oral presentation session where communicative competence and language use can be evaluated.

CASE II

The second set of materials is adapted to provide training in meeting and negotiation skills as well as the writing of agendas

and minutes of meetings. (Appendix B) The case method is applied in this training package for a three to four week module. This set of materials is an illustration of the blend of multi-disciplinary resources, namely, from industrial engineering, human resource management, industrial law and the language of meetings and negotiations. The two main texts from which the materials are constructed are Nkomo, Fottler and McAfee's text on Applications in personnel / human resource management and O'Driscoll and Pilbeam's lists of language points in Meetings and discussions.

The case study on management/labour relationship and wage contract negotiations in an aerospace industrial setting provides a meaningful and realistic context. Only minor contextual adjustments in the area of labour practices and labour law in the local context are needed. The project approach is further applied and group efforts in role-playing for the management and union teams are stimulated. A multi-skill dimension is built into the activities when the agenda and set of minutes form part of the meeting documentation and the basis for the points of the ensuing negotiation.

In fact, the open-ended nature of the meetings and negotiations have motivational appeal for adult ESP learners. They view the situation as being more realistic and the engaging nature of the activities will result in their interactive performance. Often, their own industrial experience can be applied in problem-solving and their strategic skills can be utilised to help in reaching the contract settlement. In terms of language training, the learners' linguistic resources can be expanded as the appropriateness or inappropriateness of their language use can be reflected in the outcome of the communicative activites. Further evaluations on the purposes and effectiveness of language use can also be carried out, using a specifically designed evaluation form.

THE ROLE OF THE LANGUAGE INSTRUCTORS

As illustrated in the process of materials adaptation presented in the two cases, the role of the ESP language instructor is that of a materials designer as well as a classroom manager. In making use of materials to bring the real-world environment into the classroom, the role that remains for the instructor is to act as the facilitator in learning.

The value of self-initiated and self-organised learning must be promoted amongst learners. They must be encouraged to formulate and carry out their own collaborative learning activities. Hence, the extent and level of participation of the instructor may vary acccording to individual group needs and standards. The instructor's role as the facilitator can best be fulfilled by being the resource person providing guidance when necessary and feedback to promote learning and improve performance.

CONCLUSION

The key approach that has been advocated in this paper is flexibility in the use of textbooks and materials. Language and communication instructors are encouraged to adopt a positive approach in drawing the relevant aspects out of the textbooks and printed materials and linking them to the interactive features in the business and professional world. In this way, an effective link from the base to the action can be built and communicative competence in learners can be promoted.

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APPENDIX A - CASE I

Situation

You are the Senior Sales Engineer in Kenza Motors Inc., a Japanese car manufacturing company. The company is keen to expand its production and marketing operations and the Strategic Planning Committee will be meeting to formulate production and marketing plans for the next 2 years.

You are requested to give a short presentation to the Committee, providing your recommendations on production and marketing directions your company should set for the future.

The following tables are records of the production volume, production cost and sale price of the 4 models of cars produced in the past 4 years. You would like to draw your analysis from the data collected.

PRODUCTION, PRODUCTION COST AND SALE PRICE OF MODELS (1987)

MODEL	SPRINT (1000cc)	CONNEX (1300cc)	TRIDENT (2000cc)	SONIC (3500cc)
NO OF UNITS PRODUCED	88,000	67,000	32,000	3,700
PRODUCTION COST (PER UNIT)	8,000	12,500	28,000	56,000
SALE PRICE ($ PER UNIT)	11,000	17,500	34,000	84,000

PRODUCTION, PRODUCTION COST AND SALE PRICE OF MODELS (1988)

MODEL	SPRINT (1000cc)	CONNEX (1300cc)	TRIDENT (2000cc)	SONIC (3500cc)
NO OF UNITS PRODUCED	74,000	70,000	39,000	3,200
PRODUCTION COST (PER UNIT)	8,500	14,000	31,000	59,000
SALE PRICE ($ PER UNIT)	11,800	19,000	38,000	89,000

PRODUCTION, PRODUCTION COST AND SALE PRICE OF MODELS (1989)

MODEL	SPRINT (1000cc)	CONNEX (1300cc)	TRIDENT (2000cc)	SONIC (3500cc)
NO OF UNITS PRODUCED	50,000	74,000	52,000	3,900
PRODUCTION COST (PER UNIT)	9,800	15,800	32,700	63,000
SALE PRICE ($ PER UNIT)	12,600	21,600	39,900	90,000

PRODUCTION, PRODUCTION COST AND SALE PRICE OF MODELS (1990)

MODEL	SPRINT (1000cc)	CONNEX (1300cc)	TRIDENT (2000cc)	SONIC (3500cc)
NO OF UNITS PRODUCED	40,000	77,000	68,000	4,300
PRODUCTION COST (PER UNIT)	11,400	18,600	35,100	68,000
SALE PRICE ($ PER UNIT)	14,400	24,800	42,700	95,000

Task

I. Prepare 2 pieces of graphics to illustrate the following:

(1) Existing and projected market trends in the demand for the different models;
(2) The total profit obtained from the sale of the different models.

II. Based on the graphic illustrations, give an oral presentation highligting your interpretation of these graphs/charts. Include your analysis of the market trends for high/medium/low capacity cars as well as your recommendation on the production and marketing directions/priorities for the future.

APPENDIX B - CASE II

ROLE PLAY ON COLLECTIVE BARGAINING PROGRAMME
SESSION I -- GROUP MEETING
SESSION II -- GROUP NEGOTIATIONS

(A) CASE DESCRIPTION

Axon Corporation is a general aviation and business aircraft firm. The company manufactures aircraft, aircraft parts, avionics and other aircraft accessories. The company's products have fared well in a highly competitive market. However, in the recent 2 years, there has been a slump in the market of new general aviation aircraft. Industry experts attribute this slump to high aricraft costs. A combination of weak market demand and high product liability insurance rates have plagued the industry and have forced many to cut back production and lay off workers. However, economic forecasts indicate that demand will pick up in the forthcoming years as international sales increase. Top management at Axon is very concerned about keeping down labor costs in order to remain competitive and secure new orders. Last year the company had to close down one production line and lay off 450 workers for six weeks. The aerospace industry is also becoming increasingly automated, and Axon is planning to increase its use of robots in the production process.

A majority of Axon's 2,500 production employees are members of the Aircraft Machinists Union. A relatively good labor-management relationship has become somewhat strained because of the large-scale temporary layoffs last year. While the union is aware of the company's economic situation, it is most concerned with employment security and a better position in terms of benefits. The present three-year contract (see attached) is set to expire, and contract negotiations are set to begin. Outlines of union and company bargaining programmes are attached.

(B) ACTIVITIES

Session I - Union Meeting / Management Meeting

Each tutorial group will be divided into two teams, the union team and the management team of Axon Corporation. Study the attached information and work sheets regarding the issues for negotiation and your respective stance (CN 1 & 2). As Union and management proposals are far from agreement, each team has to conduct a meeting to decide on

strategies for achieving a favourable agreement. Each team will have its own meeting chairman and secretary to take minutes. At the meeting, re-consider the issues and discuss the following:

(1) Degree of flexibility on each provision in the proposal
(2) Possibility of revised proposals for certain provisions
(3) Alternative action if agreement cannot be reached.
(4) Additional contract terms /conditions to be included.

Record your decisions using worksheet CN3.

Session II - Union Contract Negotiations

After team preparations and discussion of bargaining strategies in Session I, the union and management teams are to meet for negotiations in Session II. Nominate a chairman for the negotiation meeting. The chairman should maintain a neutral stance; monitor the progress of the negotiations and record the results onto worksheet CN4.

Allow time for the observers' comments at the end of the meeting.

(C) OBSERVERS' ROLE

In both Sessions I & II, 2 observers are to be appointed for each team. The observers are to take note of the way the meetings are conducted, the use of meeting and negotiation skills and the effectiveness of the group dynamics and interactions. Report your observations to the group after the role play exercises.

(D) WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT

Based on the discussions in Session I and the decisions recorded on CN3, write the minutes of either the Union or Management meetings. Students should also write the agenda of the meeting when submitting the minutes. Note that the Union/Management meeting happens to be the fifth Union/Management meeting of the Axon Corporation. When preparing the minutes, students should include all standard items and take the following into consideration:

- the standard item 'Apologies for absence',
- that the minutes of the 4th Union/Management meeting held on Wednesday, January 30, 1992] were circulated, read and signed as correct;
- that there were no matters arising from the previous minutes.

AXON CORPORATION - UNION CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS

Major Provisions of the Present Three-Year Contract

1.	Wages	:	Average hourly wage - $2.5
2.	Annual increment	:	Flexiwage system with no minimum guarantee
3.	Shift differential	:	40 cents per hour for third shift
4.	Overtime	:	All overtime paid at time and one-half
5.	Layoff notice	:	Minimum of two weeks notice
6.	Medical benefits	:	Free outpatient consultation & treatment only

BARGAINING PROGRAM: UNION AND COMPANY PROPOSALS

Issue	Union Proposal	Company Proposal	Industry Average
1. Wages	70 cents general wage increase per hour	20 cents general wage increase per hour	Average hourly rate - $3.2 in aerospace industry (average labor market for skilled workers - hourly rate at $2.8)
2. Annual increment	Flexiwage system with minimum guarantee of $50 annual increment	Keep current provisions	Varied; flexiwage system only introduced this year
3. Shift differential	20 cents/hour second shift; 50 cents/hour + $1.2/day transport allowance for third shift	Keep current provisions	40 cents/hour for third shift only
4. Overtime	Double time for all hours worked outside of normal assigned shift and for Sunday and holiday work	Keep current provision	All overtime paid at time and one-half
5. Layoff notice	Minimum of four weeks	Keep current provision	Four weeks
6. Medical benefits	Free outpatient consultation & treatment. 50% of dental & hospitalization charges for all cases after 2 years of service	Keep current provision with optional group medical insurance at $80 annual premium to be borne by employee	$30 subsidy/year for dental treatment, 80% of hospitalization charges after 5 years of service

DECISIONS OF THE MEETING GROUP ON THE BARGAINING PROGRAM: FLEXIBILITY RANGE/ REVISED UNION AND COMPANY PROPOSALS

1.	Wages	
2.	Annual Increment	
3.	Shift Differential	
4.	Overtime	
5.	Layoff Notice	
6.	Medical Benefits	
7.	Other Issues	
8.		
9.		

NEGOTIATION RESULTS

1.	Wages	
2.	Annual Increment	
3.	Shift Differential	
4.	Overtime	
5.	Layoff Notice	
6.	Medical Benefits	
7.	Other Issues	
8.		
9.		

Adapted from: Nkomo, S., Fottler, M. and McAfee, R.B. (1988). *Applications in personnel / human resource management*. Boston: PWS-KENT Publishing Company.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE LANGUAGE OF MEETINGS & NEGOTIATIONS

To understand how language is used to achieve the goals and enhance the processes of meetings and negotiations and whether you have used it effectively, complete this questionaire and obtain feedback from your observer/tutor on the main areas of language use.

	Effectively Used			Not Effectively Used	Not Used
1) Opening the meeting	1	2	3	4	5
2) Stating objectives	1	2	3	4	5
3) Eliciting Opinions	1	2	3	4	5
4) Giving and supporting opinions	1	2	3	4	5
5) Making suggestions and recommendations	1	2	3	4	5
6) Seeking clarifications	1	2	3	4	5
7) Balancing points of view	1	2	3	4	5
8) Pointing out consequences	1	2	3	4	5
9) Presenting alternatives	1	2	3	4	5
10) Expressing agreement/accepting proposals	1	2	3	4	5
11) Expressing disagreement/rejecting proposals	1	2	3	4	5
12) Proposing/taking decisions	1	2	3	4	5
13) Summarising points/decisions	1	2	3	4	5
14) Concluding the meeting	1	2	3	4	5

Reference : Ellis,M.,O'Driscoll,N.,and Pilbeam,A. (1987). Meetings and discussions.U K :Longman.